

Bacon, Eggs, and an 8-Hour Nap by unlikelyvalentines (reegars)

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: F/M, Fluff, Handholding, hop's got it bad for joyce tbh, just some Good Clean co-sleeping, they're tired and scared okay let them sleep

Language: English

Characters: Jim "Chief" Hopper, Joyce Byers

Relationships: Joyce Byers/Jim "Chief" Hopper

Status: Completed

Published: 2016-10-22

Updated: 2016-10-22

Packaged: 2022-04-01 21:28:28

Rating: Teen And Up Audiences

Warnings: No Archive Warnings Apply

Chapters: 1

Words: 3,040

Publisher: archiveofourown.org

Summary:

Set one week after Hop and Joyce's return from the Upside Down. Hopper hasn't slept in days, and Joyce offers up her bed as somewhere safe to rest.

Bacon, Eggs, and an 8-Hour Nap

He couldn't remember the last time he'd gotten a good night's sleep.

Before the kid had gone missing, sure. It'd been two weeks since the chaos started, and a week since it had concluded in a blur of flashlights and terror. *You're doing the right thing.* He just kept telling himself that. Nobody else was going to go charging headfirst into the Upside Down except for him. And Joyce, but he couldn't let her go alone. *You're doing the right thing. This is your job.*

But the terror followed. Every time he shut his eyes, he just saw Upside Down. Every time a light flickered in his home, every time he put on his uniform, every time he turned the lights off to try and sleep... It never came. The only times he'd slept since it all happened was when he had gotten so drunk he could do nothing but pass out face down on top of his blankets.

He dreamt about finding his daughter on the other side, cold and lifeless and decaying just like the others who had been taken. He woke up in a cold sweat, still half-drunk. He popped a few pills and dozed for the rest of the morning. Everyone commented on how he looked like hell, asked where he'd been the night before. Truthfully, he'd spent every night home alone, warding off the fear with alcohol and bad sitcoms. He didn't laugh.

He hadn't seen Joyce since the hospital. She'd asked him to go in and see Will, but he knew he couldn't do it. He'd done his job, and that was all he had to do. He didn't need to see another kid in a hospital bed. And he didn't need to see a kid in a hospital bed who was going to survive, when his daughter had never had a chance in hell. It made him jealous, and he hated himself for it.

And god, he just wanted to sleep.

On the seventh night since the hospital, having slept maybe a few hours out of the whole week, running on pure delirium and nicotine, he lay on his back in the dark. He genuinely feared what might happen if he closed his eyes. Knowing such things existed just on the fringe, just on the outer edge of their reality disturbed him to his

core. He felt paralyzed with the horror, remembering everything in perfect photographic detail. He wasn't going to sleep tonight.

Joyce was the only one who could understand. He didn't want to bother her, but he just couldn't do it anymore. He couldn't function like this, terrified of work, terrified of sleep, terrified of being alone in his house. All at once, he grabbed his pistol and flashlight from the bedside table where they had come to stay and he walked out into the dark living room. He turned the lamp on, half expecting it to flicker and blow the fuse, but it did not. He sighed heavily and picked up the phone, dialing the number he'd committed to memory in the last two weeks. He knew calling in the middle of the night was going to freak Joyce out, but he just needed to hear her voice.

The realization startled him as the line rang. *He needed to hear her voice.*

Before he could think on it any more, her panicked voice came, hushed on the other end. "Hello? Hello?"

"Joyce--" he sighed, already feeling guilty for waking her. "Joyce, it's me, Hopper. I'm sorry to call so late, I--"

"Hop? What's wrong? What happened?" She sounded half-asleep, but still wildly alarmed.

"Nothing, nothing-- happened... I just... I uh.... I couldn't sleep," he sighed, taking pause. "I just was thinking about everything and I uh... I dunno."

She was silent for a little too long. "You needed to talk to someone who was there."

He cleared his throat, glancing around and wondering where he'd left his cigarettes. "Yeah."

"Have you been sleeping?"

He sighed once more. "No. Not at all."

"Me either." He could hear her frown through the phone.

"I just can't.... alone in the house, in the dark, I just... I dunno. I know it's stupid Joyce, I just..." He put his head against the wall, closing his eyes before bolting them open again, afraid of what he couldn't see. "I haven't slept more than a few hours in over two weeks. It's killing me."

Her voice was quiet through the phone. Calming, somehow. "Do you work tomorrow?"

"Day off."

"Come to the house, while the boys are at school. I have some cleaning to do around the house, so I'll be up... You can sleep and I'll keep a look out for you."

"I can't ask you to--"

She let out an exasperated sigh. "You saved my son, Hop. Let me do this for you."

He knew she wasn't going to take no for an answer. "Alright. I'll come by in the morning."

Resigning for the night, he said goodbye to her and opened the fridge, taking out some leftover takeout and cracking open a beer. He put on some bad sitcoms and didn't laugh.

He pulled up to the Byer's house around 10, which was early for him these days. He hadn't slept a wink, felt like he was going to doze off at the wheel at any second, but any time sleep came anywhere close to him the fright washed over him and woke him up all over again. He parked out front, and Joyce was on the porch with her arms wrapped around herself before he even shut the driver's side door.

"Mornin'" he said, as if this was a normal day, a normal interaction, as if they hadn't ventured into another dimension to save her son from a literal monster just a week ago. All he had to say was 'mornin'. He kind of felt like an idiot.

“Are you hungry?” she asked, shivering in the November chill. “I made eggs and bacon.”

“Well, I can’t say no to that.”

They ate in silence, Hopper drinking a glass of water in lieu of coffee, as he was planning to attempt to sleep. He kept sneaking looks at her between bites, but her mind seemed to be elsewhere. She lit up a cigarette, offering him her pack without a word. He accepted and she lit it for him.

He cleared his throat, cutting through the weird silence between them. The house still smelled vaguely of gasoline and burnt carpet. “How is Will doing?”

“Getting better. Getting there. I’m just glad he’s here.” He could hear the tears that wanted to come back out in her voice, but they didn’t. He thanked god for that, as he never quite knew what to do when she cried. He wanted to be better about it, but he was just bad with anyone’s emotions, especially when those emotions stemmed from harm to a child.

“I’m glad to hear it, Joyce.”

“Well, it’s thanks to you.” She took a long drag of her cigarette and met his gaze. He watched as sadness spread over her face. “You look so tired, Hop.”

“Sorry, I—“ He wasn’t quite sure of what to say. He knew that his hair was unwashed, bags under his eyes the composite of days upon days without a wink of rest. “I wasn’t kidding, on the phone...”

He finished the last of his toast and smoked his cigarette as another awkward silence fell between them. “I’m really sorry, Jim.” Joyce spoke up, holding her cigarette up with her elbow propped on the table. She didn’t usually use his first name. He didn’t mind so much. “I’m sorry you had to go through all that to save my boy. I owe you everything.”

“You don’t owe me anything.” She didn’t know, but he was still going through it. He tried not to think about the conversation that had

happened in the black car after he'd left the hospital. "It's just my job."

She stood up, collecting their plates and cups and bringing them to the sink. "That... that was not just your 'job', okay? Please, let me just thank you. Just accept the thanks."

"...You're welcome."

She put out her cigarette and he did the same. She let out a long breath that maybe she'd been holding since the last time she'd seen him. "Well, come on, then. You need to rest."

She led him down the hall, scorch marks along the wood paneling and the floor bare of carpet. He didn't want to know what had happened when the teenagers had taken on the monster themselves in here. He didn't need to. Sleep was beginning to feel even more impossible the more he thought about how the thing had been in this very house, more than once. His stomach sank. He wasn't going to sleep, was he?

"Sorry, I don't have a guest room or anything," Joyce laughed nervously. "You can just sleep in my bed, if that's okay? I promise it's comfy."

"That's fine, Joyce. Thank you."

A beat of silence passed between them. "Can I get you anything?"

The awkward nature of their relationship was rearing its head. They weren't used to low-pressure situations, the small talk, the niceties. It was weird. "No, I'm good, I think."

"Well, I'll be right out here doing some chores and stuff... Just holler if you need me, okay?"

"Thanks."

She shut the door behind her, and just like that, he was alone again. He wasn't sure what to do with himself. Silently, he got under the covers on what he guessed was the empty side of her bed. The sheets smelled just like her hair, her clean clothes, the way it smelled when

he'd knelt down in front of her and held her hands, trying to carry her through what he had thought was just grief. It'd been so much more. He wanted to bury himself in the smell. It was so comforting. What was he feeling?

He lay there for a long time, head sinking into the pillows, listening to the sound of Joyce flitting around the house doing her various chores. He was comforted by her presence, but not enough to truly sleep. He wondered when the last time she'd slept was. He wasn't sure that he wanted to know. It was probably even worse than his case.

For a long time he lay there, scared to close his eyes. He just wanted to sleep so, so badly. Every cell in his body was begging for him to just rest, just finally sleep, but he couldn't. Every time he shut his eyes, he saw that... thing down Will's throat. The way it had squirmed and screamed when he riddled it with bullets. He tried to shake the thought, tried to think of something calm, but there was nothing calm left in him to think about. He felt exhausted tears pricking the corners of his eyes. *Just let me sleep. Please. Please.*

After what felt like hours, he heard Joyce's footsteps padding down the hallway. She opened the door gingerly and tried to tiptoe around to the bedside table. She was carrying a glass of water for him.

"Oh," she gasped softly, meeting his eyes. "You're still awake? Did I wake you? I'm so sorry."

He gulped down the knot in his throat, hoping the tears weren't showing. That was the last thing he needed. "No, I can't sleep," he said, desperately trying to hide the choked up wavering in his voice. It didn't really work.

"I'm so sorry..." Joyce said softly. "What can I do to help?" She knelt down next to the bed and put a hand on his arm. The proximity was making him a little dizzy. Maybe it was just the lack of sleep talking, but she looked so beautiful in the light coming in through the curtains. She smelled like cigarettes and floral shampoo from the supermarket uptown. He wanted to wrap himself in the smell and sleep for a year.

“I don’t—” He blinked tears from his eyes, causing her to pout her bottom lip slightly in sympathy. “I don’t know.” It left him as a whisper. He just wanted to sleep so badly.

“Would it... Would it help you if I was in here with you? The chores can wait...”

He didn’t want to make her uncomfortable. He didn’t want her to be inconvenienced even more by his presence, but she was right. It would help. “Yeah,” he said quietly, sounding more defeated than anything else. “Yeah, it would.”

She offered a small smile, then got into her side of the bed on top of the blankets. He was facing away from her, but he knew she was looking at the back of his head. “I’m right here with you. Try to breathe deeper. Close your eyes.”

He did just that, not knowing what else to say. Her presence calmed him in the mutual understanding of their fears and trauma. He knew that she understood, and that she was capable of protecting him if need be. She was so brave. Strong. Selfless. Even now.

She watched him from her pillow, listening to his breathing. After a while it began to slow into deeper breaths, and then, finally, into tiny snores. She breathed a sigh of relief that he was finally resting. She didn’t want to get up for fear of waking him, so she rolled onto her back carefully and stared up at the ceiling, trying not to think about the horrors that had just occurred within the walls just days ago. It was hard not to. Everything was going back to normal, she thought. Except her mind.

Hopper stirring next to her broke her from her train of thought. He tossed a bit and started to breathe faster, like he was feeling the beginnings of a nightmare. She debated on what to do for a moment, not sure what would be weird, what was crossing a line, but she really wanted him to sleep. She reached out and softly put a hand on his back, moving a little closer to him so perhaps he could feel her presence a bit more. The stirring stopped and he was lulled back into a restful sleep.

Again, afraid of waking him, she left her hand on his back and

instead rubbed circles slowly, like soothing a restless child. The Upside Down had brought out the petrified youth in all of them, standing with their knees knocking with a flashlight before a closet full of monsters. This time, there weren't any parents to read a bedtime story to ward off the feeling. All they could do was cling to each other and hope that thing wouldn't come back for them in the future.

Eventually, she drifted off to a light sleep too.

Hopper woke with a start, thrown out of a dream he couldn't remember. He instinctually reached for the faded blue hair tie on his wrist that had once belonged to his daughter, re-orienting himself with reality. Making sure it was all still real. He checked his watch next, seeing that the time was after seven. Were the boys home? He focused on Joyce, who in his sleep he had rolled over to face. He didn't have the heart to wake her. She needed to sleep too.

She was curled into herself in her sleep, folding herself smaller, as if she needed to take up less space. The only part of her that wasn't compacted into her little ball was her hand, which lay outstretched between them on the blankets, reaching. He felt a little sick, drowsy, disoriented, but thankful for the sleeping in they had done. It was the first time he had felt relatively okay in weeks.

Without thinking, he reached out for her hand and gently closed his larger one around it, noticing how worn the skin of her palm was. Always working with her hands, cleaning, cooking, providing for her boys. She was always so busy, so hardworking, so good. Her hand was so small in his. In all of her puffy-chested bravery last week, he'd forgotten how small she truly was, especially while she was asleep like this.

He watched her sleep through his heavy-lidded eyes for a few long minutes. It was then that he realized he wanted to kiss her. Not some desperate yearning, not some spark or flame or some fancy poetic metaphors that his wife used to eat up. It just felt right. He wanted to kiss her, gentle and quiet, just once on her plain mouth.

The thought stirred a new fear within him.

The touch of his hand began to pull her from sleep, and not wanting to be found out, he let go of her before she was conscious enough to know what he'd been doing. After a minute, she opened her eyes and looked at him groggily.

"What time is it?" she asked hoarsely, looking up at him from her home among the pillows. She looked so pretty, even when disheveled and exhausted.

"After seven," Hopped answered softly. "Thanks, uh, for letting me sleep here."

"Any time."

He watched as she pulled her hand from the space between them back to her side. "Where are the boys?"

"At the Wheeler's. They should be home in about an hour."

He moved to stand up. "Right, I should probably..."

"Are you hungry? I could make us dinner." Joyce reached out for his arm. He stopped in his tracks at the touch.

"I could eat, I guess, I don't wanna impose."

She thumbed his arm, letting a small, sleepy smile slip. "Never, Hop. Just, give me five more minutes to snooze. I'm comfortable."

She closed her eyes once more, the smile still on her lips and her hand still on his arm. It just felt natural that he should slide his hand around hers, holding it firmly between their bodies. As he did, her smile remained on her peaceful face. What a welcome sight.

"Joyce?" he said quietly, his voice coming out hoarse.

"Mhm?"

He was quiet for a long moment, squeezing her hand. "Thank you."

He didn't feel so scared.